



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

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In reply refer to: P-07-01

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On December 13, 2005, at 9:26 a.m., an apartment building exploded in Bergenfield, New Jersey, after natural gas migrated into the building from a damaged pipeline. Safety Board investigators found a break in a 1 1/4-inch steel natural gas distribution service line that was operating at 11 1/2 pounds per square inch, gauge. The break occurred at an underground threaded tee connection downstream from where excavators were removing an oil tank that was buried under the asphalt parking lot adjacent to the building. The break occurred, under the parking lot, about 7 feet 4 inches from the building's wall. Three residents of the apartment building were killed. Four residents and a tank removal worker were injured and transported to hospitals.¹

The National Transportation Safety Board determined that the probable cause of the December 13, 2005, natural gas explosion and fire in Bergenfield, New Jersey, was the failure of the American Tank Service Company to adequately protect the natural gas service line from shifting soil during excavation, which resulted in damage to the service line and the release and migration of natural gas into the apartment building. Contributing to the accident was the failure of the Public Service Electric and Gas Company to conduct effective oversight of the excavation activities adjacent to the gas service line and to be prepared to promptly shut off the flow of natural gas after the service line was damaged. Contributing to the casualties in the accident was the failure of the Bergenfield Fire Department to evacuate the apartment building despite the strong evidence of a natural gas leak and the potential for gas to migrate into the building.

¹ For additional information, see *Natural Gas Service Line Break and Subsequent Explosion and Fire, Bergenfield, New Jersey, December 13, 2005*, Pipeline Accident Brief NTSB/PAB-07/01 (Washington, DC: NTSB, 2007), available on the National Transportation Safety Board's Web site at <http://www.ntsb.gov/publicin/2007/PAB0701.pdf>.